GP Website Health Check

Garden Lane Medical Centre, Chester

This short report looks at the user experience of GP websites and how easy they are to use for members of the public to find information, book appointments, and manage medication. This report focuses on Garden Lane Medical Centre in Chester. Their website can be accessed at: www.gardenlanemedicalcentre.co.uk. The desk research upon which this report is based was completed on 15 September 2021.

What is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch Cheshire is the local independent consumer champion for health and care services, forming part of the national network of local Healthwatch across England. As part of our core activity we seek the views and experiences of residents of Cheshire East, and Cheshire West and Chester to help inform how health, care and wellbeing services are planned and delivered. The information we gather is then analysed so that we can identify and act upon trends and common themes by presenting our findings to decision makers in order to improve the services people use. We also share people's local views with Healthwatch England who strive to ensure that the government put people at the heart of care nationally.

More about our work can be found at www.healthwatchcwac.org.uk and www.healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for everyone working in the health and social care system. GP Practices have, like others, had to respond to new demands which have forced change upon them. With a heightened reliance on digital platforms for the sharing of information between service providers and service users, Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West and Chester consider it is important to undertake a GP website health check. Websites are for many people their first point of access to information, and it is therefore vital that GP websites are providing easily accessible information for their patients.

Feedback that we have gathered from people across Cheshire since the start of the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of GP Practices — with appointments and access being main areas of concern for members of the public in Cheshire. The ability to find relevant information easily through GP websites is more pressing at a time when there are long waiting times on GP phone-lines, due to increased traffic and staff shortages due to illness. Furthermore, our inability to conduct our regular Enter and View activity due to guidance around the pandemic means that we need to continue to monitor the experience for people attempting to access services.

We therefore carried out a 'health check' on GP websites in Cheshire to assess how easy the websites are to use, how easy it is to book an appointment and order repeat medication, and what signposting information and advice is available. In addition, we wanted to find examples of best practice to be able to share more widely across the primary care sector.

Similar projects have already been carried out by other Healthwatch organisations nationally including North Yorkshire and the East of England.

Methodology

We undertook a 'health check' of all websites of GP Practices in the 17 Care Communities across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester – a total of 85 practices. Care Communities aim to bring together people living, working or involved in an area to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents: There are 8 Care Communities in Cheshire East:

- Alderley Edge, Chelford, Handforth and Wilmslow
- Bollington, Disley and Poynton
- Congleton and Holmes Chapel
- Crewe
- Knutsford
- Macclesfield
- Nantwich, Wrenbury or Audlem
- Sandbach, Middlewich, Alsager, Scholar Green and Haslington.

There are 9 Care Communities in Cheshire West and Chester:

- Chester East (Christleton, Littleton, Huntington, Boughton, Upton, Hoole, Mollington, Mickle Trafford)
- Chester South (Blacon, Lache, Saughall, Eccleston, Handbridge, Dodleston, Kinnerton)
- Ellesmere Port
- Chester Central (City Centre)
- Frodsham, Helsby and Elton
- Neston and Willaston
- Northwich
- Rural (Tarporley, Malpas, Ashton, Farndon, Tattenhall, Kelsall, and Tarvin)
- Winsford.

16 Healthwatch Cheshire volunteers undertook the health checks. The volunteers acted as 'mystery shoppers', in the role of members of the public.

The health checks involved asking 24 questions and providing answers to these questions to reflect positives and areas for improvement on websites. Volunteers did not evaluate their own GP's website.

Our volunteers were asked to answer the questions as if they themselves wanted to find the information on each website and as if it were their own GP Practice. It was recognised that one volunteer might answer differently to another: this represents the variation that members of the public might demonstrate when visiting their own GP website.

Similarly, if a volunteer was unable to find information on a practice website — this represents a member of the public not being able to find the information they need. Such instances highlight a need for website improvement in terms of accessibility or clarity of navigation.

We adapted questions developed by Healthwatch colleagues in the East of England to reflect current national circumstances and issues raised by our ongoing work in Cheshire. We asked the following questions:

- What is the name of the GP Practice?
- Where is the GP Practice located?
- Which care community is the GP Practice located in?
- Does the website have a search bar?
- Is the website accessible (simple and easy to use, with clear fonts and language)?
- Is there the facility to change to a language other than English or support for the partially sighted?
- Does the website have links to self-care and support organisations for health and wellbeing?
- Was it easy to find the information you needed? This will include at least: 1) Link to NHS 111 First. 2) Social Prescribers linked to GP Practice. 3) Local Authority Live Well website.
- Is it easy to access information on services and make an appointment?
- Does the GP Practice detail out of hours advice for use of NHS services?
- Is there a link for patient log-in and for downloading the NHS app?
- Is there a link to the NHS COVID-19 advice site?
- Does the website contain COVID updates and news?
- Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?
- Are the GP Practice's values and aims clearly outlined?
- Is the GP Practice's latest CQC rating and report detailed and linked?
- Does the website contain key contact information for staff, (incl. staff profiles)?
- Does the website have a patient feedback facility?
- Is it easy to find out how to make a complaint?
- Does the website contain current Patient Participation Group (PPG) information?
- Are there social media links (e.g. for patients/users to share useful information from the GP website on their social media platforms)?
- Does the website detail Practice opening times, location map and address?
- Are there options of in-person, phone, or video appointments?
- Your overall opinion of the website, how logical is it, is it easy to navigate, is it user-friendly?

The findings of this research will provide information to GP Practices, and partners including Local Authorities, NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Hospital Trusts, voluntary sector organisations, the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England. Our volunteers found many great examples of GP websites providing crucial information and support for members of the public in Cheshire, but also examples of areas in need of improvement. Healthwatch Cheshire offers to work with GP Practices and their Patient Participation Groups to continue to improve their websites for use by their patients and members of the public in Cheshire.

The following pages provide our 'health check' on the website of Garden Lane Medical Centre.

Website Health Check

What is the name of the GP Practice?

Garden Lane Medical Centre

Where is the GP Practice located?

Cheshire West

Which care community is the GP Practice located in?

Chester Central (City Centre)

Does the website have a search bar?

Yes.

Is the website accessible (simple and easy to use, with clear fonts and language)?

Yes. There are fonts in various colours for different headings.

Is there the facility to change to a language other than English or support for the partially sighted?

Yes. There is a selection of 110 languages to choose from. It is not clear if there is support for the partially sighted on the website.

Does the website have links to self-care and support organisations for health and wellbeing?

Yes, under the heading Your Health.

Was it easy to find the information you needed? This will include at least: 1) Link to NHS 111 First. 2) Social Prescribers linked to GP Practice. 3) Local Authority Live Well website.

Yes. NHS 111 was found under opening times and social prescriber information was under prescriptions. I could not find Live Well on the website.

Is it easy to access information on services and make an appointment?

Yes. There is a tab at the top of the webpage under opening times.

Does the GP Practice detail out of hours advice for use of NHS services?

Yes, at the top of the main webpage under opening times.

Is there a link for patient log-in and for downloading the NHS app?

Unsure. It does mention that patients need to be registered to access parts of the website. Under online patient access there is a link to make appointments.

Is there a link to the NHS COVID-19 advice site?

Yes. It is on a floating banner when first accessing the website and on the main front page.

Does the website contain COVID updates and news?

Yes, it is on a floating banner when first accessing the website and on the main front page.

Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

We could not find evidence of this.

Are the GP Practice's values and aims clearly outlined?

We could not find evidence of this.

Is the GP Practice's latest CQC rating and report detailed and linked?

Yes.

Does the website contain key contact information for staff, (incl. staff profiles)?

Yes, under appointments there is consultation availability.

Does the website have a patient feedback facility?

We could not find evidence of this.

Is it easy to find out how to make a complaint?

Yes. This is under the Further Information menu on the right of the page.

Does the website contain current Patient Participation Group (PPG) information?

Yes. This is under the Have Your Say menu on the right of the page.

Are there social media links (e.g. for patients/users to share useful information from the GP website on their social media platforms)?

Yes, there are links to Facebook and Twitter accounts found on the front webpage at the bottom.

Does the website detail Practice opening times, location map and address?

Yes. This is on the main menu tab along the top.

Are there options of in-person, phone, or video appointments?

Yes. Although this is difficult to find on the main appointment page.

Your overall opinion of the website, how logical is it, is it easy to navigate, is it user-friendly?

Yes. There is a lot of information on the website but it is not always logical where to find things. To find things we often had to use the search facility but this was not able to find everything we were looking for.

Feedback from GP Practice

No feedback was received at the time of publication.

Next Steps

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have seen enormous pressure placed on GP practices across the UK. They have been required to significantly adapt ways of working within very short time scales. Times like these present challenges but also opportunities. GP Practices have had to work much harder with often reduced workforces, delivering online and phone consultations in place of face-to-face.

It is in this context that we have undertaken this work, to shine a light on a simple, yet very important, area for improving patient experiences. Our volunteers found many great examples of GP websites providing crucial information and support for members of the public in Cheshire, but also examples of areas in need of improvement.

Healthwatch Cheshire will disseminate our findings to all the GP Practices involved in this study, and we will seek to work with GP Practices, NHS Cheshire CCG, Integrated Care Partnerships, and Care Communities to identify ways of improving GP websites.

We offer to all the GP Practices that we have 'health checked' an opportunity to discuss their results with them for their own website, and consider ways of making improvements where needed.

We will continue to gather feedback from the public regarding their experiences of GP Practices more widely, and use this to identify areas of good practice and of concern.